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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001442

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL MOPS KPKO SO ET

SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ASWJ SAYS REACHED BREAKTHROUGH WITH TFG

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Ted Harkema. Reasons: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Alhu Sunnah Wal Jammah (ASWJ) leadership council member Mahdi Dahir Sheikh Nur told PolOff on June 18 that ASWJ and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Sharmarke had reached an agreement "in principle" to form a military alliance against al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam. Contrary to recent press reports, Mahdi said there was, as of yet, no cooperation between TFG and ASWJ field commanders. He also stated all ASWJ militias would now settle into a completely defensive posture to prepare for expected attacks by al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam following the death of TFG Minister of Security Omar Hashi. End Summary.

ASWJ and TFG Reach an Agreement "In Principle"

¶2. (C) Mahdi told PolOff on June 18 that several members of the ASWJ leadership council had recently left Addis Ababa and flown to Nairobi for talks with TFG PM Sharmanke, and that the two sides had outlined an alliance agreement that was now awaiting approval by TFG President Sheikh Sharif and TFG Deputy Prime Minister Sharif Hassan. The agreement was for a military alliance where ASWJ would keep its separate identity but fight alongside TFG forces. ASWJ agreed to postpone political powersharing talks until after al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam were defeated, and the TFG agreed to share military resources. ASWJ was cautious, however, and questioned whether Sharif Hassan would support the agreement, noting that they continued to view him with mistrust. Mahdi also noted that Sharmanke had apologized for his government's recent attempts to undermine ASWJ by forming an alternative ASWJ organization in Mogadishu.

No Alliance Yet, Press Reports are Propaganda

¶3. (C) Mahdi said recent press reports that ASWJ and TFG commanders in central Somalia had formed an alliance earlier this week were entirely inaccurate. He said those reports were deliberately disseminated by the TFG "scare al-Shabaab." He said as of yet, no TFG or ASWJ field commanders had met. Rather, he said, on the morning of the Beledweyne bombing, he had been negotiating with Abdi Karin Farah (who was also killed in the bombing) to have Omar Hashi go to Balanbale to meet with Ethiopian military officers and ASWJ field commanders to integrate ASWJ into Hashi's campaign plan for Hiraan.

ASWJ Going "Defensive"

¶4. (C) The ASWJ leadership council advised their field commanders on June 18 to fall into a completely defensive mode after the death of Omar Hashi, and in preparation for the expected imminent fall of Beledweyne to al-Shabaab. Mahdi believed that once Beledweyne fell, al-Shabaab would have another avenue of approach from which to attack ASWJ. Mahdi was clearly devastated by the death of Hashi, and called the event 'a national tragedy for Somalia.' He expected that Hashi's death would give al-Shabaab the initiative and destroy the TFG's morale.

ASWJ and Former TFG DPM Ahmed Abdisalam

¶5. (C) In response to PolOff's query on ASWJ's relationship with former TFG Deputy Prime Minister Abdisalam who had been spending a fair amount of time in Addis Ababa of late, Mahdi said ASWJ had "cut ties" with Ahmed and "threw him out." Mahdi stated Ahmed had been trying to use ASWJ as an Ayr platform to propel himself back into a position of power, but ASWJ had rejected this. He commented that "Ahmed was only out for Ahmed."

Comment

¶6. (C) Only two weeks ago, ASWJ leaders said they were convinced the that TFG was attempting to undermine them, and that an alliance was not likely in the near term, so what changed? We have noticed a marked change in the confidence level of ASWJ leaders since their defeat at Wabho on June 5

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from arrogance and overconfidence to one of caution and uncertainty, and this may have convinced them to seek an alliance with greater urgency. We can only speculate that the TFG's recent resistance to ASWJ may also have been mitigated by the failure of the TFG's offensive in Mogadishu.

End Comment.

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